

Topic and Role Outline

Topic: Peer-to-Peer File Sharing

- **The issue:**
 - Peer-to-peer technology such as that used at Napster or YouTube makes it easy for users to share files such as music or video online. Some people think this is harmless—a good way to share a favorite song or show with a friend. Others think sharing files in this way causes harm to the artists who originally produced the work being shared because people can listen to or watch their work without paying for it or without seeing the ads of companies who paid for it.
- **The question:**
 - Should people be allowed to share music or video files online?
- **The scenario:**
 - Imagine that Congress is debating a new law that would make sharing music and video files online legal, and you are speaking before Congress to persuade them to vote the way a person in your role likely would want them to vote.
- **Roles:**
 - Singer whose new CD was just released (note that some musicians are tolerant of file sharing and some are very opposed)
 - Record company executive
 - College student on a limited budget who wants to share favorite music with friends
 - Television and film producer
 - YouTube user
 - Cutting-edge technology company

Topic: Reprinting freelancers' work

- **The issue:**
 - Usually when freelance writers or photographers sell their works to newspapers or magazines, they sell them for a very specific use, such as to be printed in a specific issue of a magazine. The publishers of the newspaper and magazine can reprint the article or photograph along with the work (magazine or newspaper) in its entirety, so as to distribute the work to readers. They cannot however, use the photograph or article on its own or in a new work. The original author or photographer usually keeps the right to resell the story or photograph for other uses. But what happens if the magazine or newspaper publishes a digital copy, such as an online database or a CD of past issues, of the original work in which the photograph or article appeared? Is that a reprint or a new use? In several court cases involving publishers such as National Geographic and the *New York Times*, courts have decided—both ways!
- **The question:**
 - Should magazines and newspaper be allowed to post a freelance writer's or photographer's work in a digital version, or should the freelancer be paid extra for that right?

- **The scenario:**
 - Imagine that a lawsuit of several freelancers vs. a national magazine that published their work on a compilation CD without paying extra finally reaches the Supreme Court, and you are asked to testify. You must persuade the judges to vote the way a person in your role would want them to vote.
- **The roles:**
 - A freelance photographer
 - Publisher of a national magazine
 - A student researching for a school project
 - A freelance writer

Topic: Extending the timeframe for copyright protection

- **The issue:**
 - In 1998, a law was passed extending copyright protection from the previous period of the life of the author, plus 50 years to the new period of the life of the author, plus 70 years. This law sparked heated debate and lawsuits. Many people thought that the protection was good for authors and other creators. Others said it mainly protected corporations such as Disney, which lobbied hard for the law, since Disney holds valuable copyrights. Many argued that it violated the intent of the framers of the Constitution, who specified that copyright should be granted for only a limited time and kept important works out of the public domain, where they could be used freely.
- **The question:**
 - Should copyright be granted for a period as long as 70 years after the author's or creator's death or should the work move into the public domain sooner?
- **The scenario:**
 - Imagine that there is a new bill before Congress to limit the time for which a work can be protected by copyright to 50 years and you have to speak to Congress about the issue. Try to persuade Congress to vote for or against the new bill, based on how a person in your role would vote.
- **The roles:**
 - The granddaughter of a musician whose work was originally copyrighted 50 years ago
 - The president of a company owning the rights to books that were originally copyrighted 50 years ago
 - The owner of a Web site that published e-books of works that are in the public domain
 - A historian